

**{{Final}}**      **Beyond the Death of Man:**  
**Foucault, Derrida, and Philosophical Anthropology**<sup>1</sup>  
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**The death and re-birth of man: Foucault, Derrida, and Philosophical Anthropology**

If one, today, professes an interest in the human, in anthropology, perhaps even in pursuing a certain ‘humanism’, one is immediately confronted with an almost spontaneous objection, one that would foreclose the entire affair: have we not gone beyond ‘Man’?<sup>2</sup> Has the human not been surpassed either by its own creations or simply by an ontological univocity or ‘immanence’ that would refuse to posit man or anything like it as the pinnacle of creation or

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<sup>1</sup> Given originally as a talk at the workshop on *Philosophical Anthropology and Contemporary Continental Philosophy* at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and repeated in a revised form at the University of East Anglia on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Many thanks to Tom Greaves for the invitation to the latter, and to those who partook in the debate afterwards and who simply came to listen to either talk. It was composed in such a way as to build on a talk on Heidegger and the natural sciences, particularly zoology and ethology, in the context of the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* and elsewhere, given by Elizabeth Cykowski and entitled, ‘Heidegger and the Idea of Philosophical Anthropology’.

<sup>2</sup> A note on sexuation in language: it is extremely difficult to manipulate the English language to avoid saying ‘he’ in certain contexts, when it comes to speaking of the already gendered word, ‘man’, to indicate the genus of human beings, the outcome of anthropogenesis. I have chosen to continue to employ this term, not least because the figures with which this essay is concerned, Derrida and Foucault in particular, also do so, and with full consciousness of the implications — neither of whom can be said to be in the least bit naïve, and I am tempted to say, prejudiced, when it comes to sex and gender.

The question is not central to the present work, but even so, this gendered term, its phallogocentrism, as well as its unity, are under continual interrogation in their work: to suppose that such gendering can simply be surpassed or neutralised without further ado would fail to do justice to the subtlety of their gesture, which neither simply accepts the binarity and the gendering of words that follows from it, nor accepts that language can simply, by stipulation, be neutralised in this regard.

If we are speaking of the overcoming of Man, and the difficulties inherent in that gesture, we are also, albeit only indirectly, speaking of the difficulty of leaving behind a language that remains oriented towards a binary sexuality, often, if not always, tilted towards the masculine pole.

And if it is difficult to avoid speaking of ‘he’ when one speaks of man, or in one’s own name, speaking as male, in English, then it is close to impossible in certain regards in the languages which we are ultimately reading here: *homme*, *uomo*, *Mensch*. These are *explicitly* sexuated, and it is partly to mark this linguistic heritage and provenance — and not to presume that its effacement is straightforwardly possible — that I continue to use the masculine pronoun.

If one needs to cite examples here, somewhat at random, to demonstrate the operative character of the distinction between man and human, one might excerpt the following, from Foucault: ‘and *human beings* existed, but *man* did not’ (*Order of Things*, 322, emphases added), and one might advert simply to Derrida’s title, ‘*Les fins de l’homme*’. At the same time, Agamben, who, even though he remains in the background of the present work, forms a not insubstantial presence there, almost everywhere but perhaps most explicitly in *What is Philosophy?* distinguishes between man (*uomo*) and human (*umano*) such that the human is only truly ‘man’ when it has entered into the process of anthropogenesis or ‘hominisation’, which involves for Agamben the entry into language and the *polis*. He speaks of *man* as a conjunction of the *human* and the *inhuman*: ‘in man [...] the human and the inhuman face each other without any natural articulation’ (*What is Philosophy?* 14), and affirms that a civilisation can originate only from the invention and construction of a historical articulation between them (*ibid.*, 14–15).

in any way unique. Humanism would be little more than the flipside of theism, as Nietzsche had it, since to imagine a human who would somehow stand before and thus outside the object of its representation or transcendental construction would be to reinstall a transcendence, to bestow a super-natural character on an entity who was after all just as much a product and a part of nature as anything else. It would be to forget — somewhat disingenuously — that God is dead, and it would rather affirm that beings as a whole did indeed form a kind of totality, or, as Alain Badiou would say, a ‘One’.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, some, perhaps more numerous than we might imagine, have continued to speak of ‘man’, in a way that we should presume is not without reason. Therefore, it will be just if we stage a debate between post-humanism and humanism, in a certain form, the principal actors of which will comprise Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, and the Philosophical Anthropologists, Arnold Gehlen prominent among them. In preparing for such a discussion, the first question to be raised is the following: why, after post-humanism, might we still want to talk about the human? Can we do so? Should we?

### **A prehistory of the question**

We shall respond to this question by looking at the work of Michel Foucault, and in particular *The Order of Things (Les mots et les choses)*, subtitled ‘*An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*’ — the ‘human sciences’ which also means the knowledge of the human being, and the emergence of the latter as an object which can be known. Not incidentally, this text is the one in which Foucault gets as close as he ever will to Martin Heidegger: indeed, one might risk the hypothesis that Foucault is here asking after something like the historical conditions

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<sup>3</sup> The exposition, at this point, stands under the influence of Diana Gasparian’s PhD thesis, *From Fundamental Ontology to Fundamental Anthropology: The Subject as Negativity (Hegel, Kojève, Heidegger, and Sartre)* (2018), which I was fortunate enough to read immediately before the final revision of the current text. It demonstrates the existence of a rare ally in the attempt to reinvigorate humanism, of which the current work forms a part.

for the possibility of man's own ability to put himself in question. This for Heidegger was the defining feature of man or 'Dasein'. The question allowed man alone to exceed the terrain of *entities* and hover in an uncertainty as to their *Being*. In this suspense, standing apart from beings in their totality and their stable *presence*, Dasein would be allowed to ponder the very meaning of this Being, in all its potentiality.

The privilege of man, for Heidegger, is that it is the only entity capable of asking itself questions, and in particular the question 'what *am* I?' and thus 'what ought I to be?', 'what have I the possibility of being?' — Humans are both afflicted and blessed with an indeterminacy as to their essence, which frees them from any determinate generic model or pre-given potentiality which they are simply to realise, in the automatic way in which an animal is said to, as it matures. At the same time, this potentiality, thus untrammelled, allows human beings to ask not just the ontic question of 'who or what am *I*?' but the ontological question of 'what does it mean simply to *be* (any kind of thing at all)?' Because they innately constitute a question for themselves, human beings are capable of *ontology*, which is to say, philosophy.

There are three levels, at least, to this questioning ability, which broadly align with the Aristotelian taxonomy of individual, species, and genus (*tode ti, eidos, genos*): what am I (as an individual) to be? What is it to be human? and What is that Being to which we in our questioning ability have unique access? Each of these questions is intimately related to the others, and together they form a knot which defines the human being, and precisely as an entity for whom individuality is of the essence, an individuation more extreme than that of any animal, and for whom this relation to their own individuality is inextricable from the possibility of accessing Being as such, which is after all, one might suggest, the potential singularity of *all things* within our experience, in light of our dawning finitude.

It is worth noting at the outset that to remain at the level of either or both of the first two questions is to confine oneself to the realm of anthropology, and, for Heidegger, such a gesture is incomplete and inadequate on its own: without the acknowledgement of man's ability to think ontologically, without, in other words, considering Dasein's inherent relation to Being (*Sein*) that comprises the highest dignity of the human being, one has not done justice to the essence of man, or one has remained halfway. This is where one would be left if one did not risk the leap to the third question: we shall not have exhausted the revelatory power of death if we consider it solely as that which most fully individuates the human being; we should move beyond that existentialist moment and realise that death as the eternally non-actual possibility that is always impending is a model according to which we might rethink *Being itself* as a pure potentiality not destined to and hence not modelled upon actuality.

One should not remain *simply* at the level of anthropology, then, as Heidegger considered Jean-Paul Sartre to have done. But that said, as the 'Letter on "Humanism"' demonstrates, things are not so simple: for philosophy, the practice of ontology, is precisely that moment at which the human being comes into its own for the very first time, and therefore there is never a moment in Heidegger's thought at which anthropology may be left behind altogether.

In any case, it is in the *question* that ontology begins to happen, for here one first gains thoughtful access to possibility as such (in the suspension of actuality), and this interrogative capacity is considered by Heidegger without any exception to be a unique trait of the human being. Indeed he seems to make this assertion in a rather straightforwardly transcendental way, in the sense that it is ahistorical, invariant across all human beings, or more precisely, it avers that one becomes fully human only when one, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, becomes capable of asking this kind of question.

Foucault, on the other hand, does not think that such transcendental structures — the human itself and its capacities or ‘faculties’ — are without a history, or a pre-history, and that implies in turn an uncertain future. Hence the possibility of speaking quite seriously of a potentially impending ‘end of man’ (*fin de l’homme*). Thus, with this Heideggerian background of Foucault’s *Order of Things* in mind, let us see precisely how Foucault takes and modifies the Heideggerian transcendental position and historicises it in a way that comes close to leading it beyond the human.

Having done this, we shall then turn to Jacques Derrida and his response to Foucault’s idea of an end of man, since this will allow us to demonstrate that a surpassing of man, or even of the transcendental subject, in the name of the historicity of the systematic structures within which structuralism affirms the subject to be always already enmeshed, may not be so straightforward.

Having shown a certain persistence of man even after the posthuman turn, despite man’s ‘death’, we shall be able to conclude with a brief hypothesis on the discipline known as ‘Philosophical Anthropology’, with regard to the form that it took in the first part of the 20th century, and in particular in the guise of such sadly neglected thinkers as Arnold Gehlen. This will allow us to close by suggesting that Derrida’s intervention, which puts in doubt the very possibility of an unambiguous cessation of humanity, can in fact be read as opening the way once again for precisely such a philosophical anthropology, but a philosophical anthropology that Derrida himself does not pursue. And we can wonder why.

### **Foucault’s *Order of Things***

It is worth recounting Foucault’s supposedly well-known story of the invention and the disappearance of man, not least because it is essentially difficult to read. A text that has come to be considered self-evident is not likely to be yielding its truth or the most philosophically

significant of its elements. Therefore, let us once again open the *Order of Things* at the fold in which the Classical age is tipping over into the Modern, the era which is our own — or at least it was in the 1960's, when Foucault was writing.

The Modern age is the age of man, the only age in which something like 'Man' (as opposed to 'human beings') was possible — man as the object of a specific knowledge and a specific set of sciences. Thus, Foucault writes a prehistory of the *human* sciences which he finds still to be flourishing in the 1960's, albeit on the brink of a possible collapse, as the centrality of man to the significant structures he inhabits is subjected to serious interrogation.

Demonstrating that man has a date of birth destines him immediately to a subsequent death. For delaying such a death, Foucault derides any form of anthropology or anthropologicistic thinking. Such anthropocentric thought flourishes in a very particular way not just from the modern age onwards, when the representation of the world comes to be centred around the subject, with Descartes among others, but in a very particular way from the time of Kant onwards, as epistemology and ontology take a transcendental turn, and allow man to be placed not just in a position that opposes it to objects as the subject that represents these objects to itself, but in the form of that entity which constructs the object in the very first place, that entity without which the entirety of the experience of nature, beings as a whole, would be impossible.

In Kant's critical thought, the subject's representations are understood to be the conditions for the *possibility* of entities — this is what it means to speak of the subject as transcendental. Thus, Kant takes the mediaeval and classical notion of the transcendental, and rids it of its transcendence with respect to the totality of entities by transposing it into the human being and its subjective mental faculties: so all possible entities find their transcendental conditions of possibility within the human being. All entities are conditional upon the existence of the transcendental subject, which is instantiated by the human being,

and for this reason the transcendental conditions for the possibility of knowledge, experience, and thus the object of experience or ‘nature’, are to be found in man.

But the human being is at the same time not just a subject but also an object — it does not transcend the field of objectivity altogether, even if it remains in part distinguished by its subjectivity, its capacity for experience and construction: human beings also *appear* to themselves, in both their inner and outer sense. We are in that respect just one object among others, and yet a privileged object which is also somehow the bearer of a subjectivity that makes every object possible, as if one element within a field held the key to that entire realm and indeed constituted the keystone of the entire edifice, without which the structure of that field could not remain standing.

Man is both transcendental with respect to the empirical field and yet also in certain respects empirical himself. Thus, even though the transcendental and the empirical are to be kept rigorously distinct, in the case of man they overlap: man folds back upon himself, doubling over.

We are perhaps beginning to get some sense of what it might mean for Foucault to speak of the ‘invention of man’ at the turn of the 18th and 19th Centuries, which he considers to be the most crucial event in the prehistory of our time, unearthed by the archaeology he is conducting, for it marks the beginning of an era, our own, which in Foucault’s day appeared to be drawing to a close.

### **Foucault’s retrospective archaeology and his Heideggerianism**

There is always a retrospective character to Foucault’s histories, which is one reason why he describes them as genealogies or, earlier on, and at this stage, in the mid-1960’s in particular, as archaeologies. The primary reason for an investigation of the Classical age would be to understand the Modern, and the particular perspective taken upon the past — from the

standpoint of a certain analysis of the present — will explain why this past is characterised in the precise way that it is. So to approach a more exact and progressive understanding of the *Modern* age, the age of Man, the epoch of the transcendental subject of Kantianism, we should briefly recall Foucault's understanding of the Classical age, for such a geological investigation of the strata upon which our age is built will help to reveal certain possibilities concealed within that present, potentials which testify to a certain future that, without the archaeological investigation, might not have been suspected.

According to Foucault, the Classical epoch extended from the end of the Renaissance in the mid-17th century to the turn of the 19th century, and here the notion of man as we have conceived it up to the 1960's, in the so-called Modern age, had no place. Indeed, it is partly this very absence that allows the chronological delimitation itself, so frequently misunderstood by professional Historians.

We should remember that Foucault is, in the *Order of Things*, carrying out an archaeology of *knowledge*, and that is to say, a study of the historical preconditions which made certain *sciences* possible, and in particular the sciences of linguistics, biology, and political economy. The objects of these sciences were language, life, and labour, three features which had long been recognised as defining properties of the human being. In these features, and also as their very condition of possibility, man as a finite mortal entity could see himself reflected, and thus come to know himself — they amounted to an objectification of his nature. Thus these sciences would come to be understood as 'human sciences', knowledge with respect to objects in some way external to man but in which he could nevertheless gaze in order to see his own reflection staring back. If these objects had become the topic of rigorous and accepted science, then so could the human. And at one level, what Foucault is recounting is precisely a history of the way in which the discourses upon these objects assumed the character of a science — he is writing a chronicle of their gathering scientificity.



At this point it is particularly important to recall that Foucault's text is looking retrospectively at the Classical age from the standpoint of the Modern. In the Modern age, three features of the human had achieved prominence, and around them the new sciences of linguistics, biology and political economy, were developed: these were language, life and labour. These are clearly identifiable as features of man, and cast a retrospective shadow which allows Foucault to distinguish and identify the three strands which may be said to constitute their prehistory. These features arose in the particular form of the objects of the three modern sciences of linguistics, biology, and political economy, which were constituted in that particular form only in the Modern age. Among these features, *language* was to play an especially crucial role.

Foucault's archaeology is concerned not simply to identify the manner in which a discourse comes to be identified as a genuine 'science', but also to identify the conditions which make the appearance of certain *objects* possible at certain points in history and within certain discourses — objects which might then be able to become the topic of a strict science. In other words, Foucault tries to isolate the *historical* a priori of a certain discipline, or discourse: he asks, what conditions must be in place in order to bring about a certain *knowledge*, and eventually, perhaps, a true *science*, of certain entities ('positivities'), like life, labour, and language, in particular, and that involves precisely the formation of a scientific — or knowable — object *of* those sciences.

Thus, the historical a priori amounts to the transcendental conditions for the possibility of manifestation, the coming to light of entities which can be objects of a certain science. These conditions so closely resemble Heidegger's understanding of 'Being', in all its historicity (which he began to call in the 1930's the *Seinsgeschichte*), as to be barely distinguishable from it. Together with its focus on man and his reflexivity (which for

Heidegger, at least, takes the form of the question), this constitutes one of the many reasons for suggesting that *The Order of Things* is indeed Foucault's most Heideggerian text.

### **The sovereignty of language**

Foucault demonstrates that, in the Classical age, *language*, and more precisely its diachronic form, *discourse*, were dominant among the conditions of manifestation that he is identifying.

The order of things, the classification of *Being* into a set of identifiable *entities*, was predominantly filtered through language and the linguistic representation of objects.

Speaking or naming translates the undifferentiated and chaotic continuity of Being into a spatially distributed *grid* or *table* — this is how Being is transformed into beings, in Heidegger's terms, how potentiality is actualised. Language, wielded by man, it is true, sorts the continuity of *Being* into a discontinuous divided table of *entities*. Foucault tells us that words 'provide[d] a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things' (*Order of Things*, 304).

Thus, language in the Classical age took priority among the conditions that allowed entities to become manifest, to take upon themselves an individual identity — the event of being, at this precise point, became identical with the event of language. In a locution that should be closely followed as it discreetly weaves itself into the fabric of this part of the text, Foucault describes language in the Classical age as *sovereign*: 'in the Classical age, discourse is that translucent necessity through which representation and beings must pass, as beings are represented to the mind's eye, and as representation renders beings visible in their truth. The possibility of knowing things and their order passes, in the Classical experience, through the *sovereignty of words*' (*Order of Things*, 311, emphases added).

The primary or 'sovereign' transcendental condition in the Classical epoch is language, and *not* the human being; the human being does have a role in the Classical

episteme (*épistēmē*<sup>4</sup>), but this is confined to effecting the discontinuous articulation of the continuity of beings precisely by means of *naming*: ‘the great, endless, continuous surface is printed with distinct characters, in more or less general features, in marks of identification — and, consequently, in words’ (*Order of Things*, 310, cf. *ibid.*, 309). Human nature, with its ability to speak and name, allows a tabulated space to be created. Representations, in the great ‘chain of being’, are thus ‘immobilised in the form of a general table of all that exists’ (*ibid.*, 309). And man’s role is simply that of a functionary of discourse, or language, a discourse that stands in the place that man is yet to occupy: that of the ‘King’ or sovereign.

But what are we to understand by this strange sovereignty of language? In this Classical context, ‘sovereign’ means whatever occupies the supreme and autocratic position of *Being*, that which enables manifestation; but at the same time, it implies transcendence. So, language is a *transcendental* condition of revelation which is also *transcendent*.

Another crucial feature of this sovereign discourse is that it is *reflexive*: it has ‘the power to *represent* its *representation*’ (*Order of Things*, 309, emphases added). Language is sovereign, transcending the order of the things that it creates, but it is also capable of ‘flexing’ back upon itself and representing its own being. Still in the Classical context, Foucault describes this ability not simply as if language were autonomous in this gesture, but as if this linguistic reflex were a part of ‘human nature’ (*la nature humaine*): ‘human nature [is...] like the folding [*pli*] of representation back upon itself’ (*ibid.* 309/320). This is said in the context of a certain *spatialising* characteristic of Classical thought and indeed of language: speaking or naming transforms a linear *temporal* flow of thought — or the

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault tends to italicise this, and this together with the fact that the grave accent presumably standing for a metron, while the second acute represents the equivalent in the Greek, we may assume that this is a transcription of the Greek word ἐπιστήμη, even though it has become standard practice to enunciate the English equivalent, quite logically as ‘an episteme’, which would be an *element* or a historically specific *kind* of *epistēmē*, or rather the historical condition of particular knowledges.

undifferentiated flux of Being — into a stable spatial or spatially representable table of beings.

So, in the Classical period, the reflexive function devolves upon language — wielded by the human certainly, in the name of making knowledge of nature possible — and thus the most fundamental instance of reflexivity, the crucial moment of ‘self-consciousness’, if one could speak of such a thing at this stage, does not belong primarily to human beings. This leads Foucault to say, as to the Classical age, ‘man [*l’homme*], as a primary reality with his own density [*réalité épaisse et première*], as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge [*connaissance*], has no place in it’ (*Order of Things*, 310/321).

In the Classical age, the sovereign condition of knowledge was language.

Now for the crucial move: in the Modern age, the role of the sovereign will be assumed by man.

### ***Meninas on the threshold***

Foucault clarifies the nature of the threshold between these two ages, rather famously, by considering Velázquez’s much earlier painting, *Las Meninas*, the ‘Ladies in Waiting’ (Museo del Prado, Madrid, 1656). This painting, in the way it represents, and represents in particular the human being that is the king, foreshadows the transition from the Classical to the Modern age, and hence the invention of man, in the very particular place that he becomes capable of occupying in the Modern age — with Kant.

In Classical thought, the subject and object of representation never coincide in the same space: one is always transcendent to the other: language remains on a different, ‘meta-’ level with respect to that which it represents, even when it represents itself, in which case it will only be able to objectify itself, precisely in the form of the ‘object-language’, we may presume. As Foucault puts it, ‘he who ties together all the interlacing threads of the

“representation in the form of a picture or table” — he is never to be found in that table himself” (*Order of Things*, 308). The namer is not itself named. This is the sovereign transcendence of language in the Classical age, or of the language *user*.

In *Las Meninas*, the subject and object of representation, the one representing and the one represented, *almost* coincide. But not quite.

The spectator of the actual painting has to adopt the point of view of the king who is *being painted*, who is the *object* of the painting and whom we see reflected back to us in the mirror (along with his wife, we may presume) at the centre of the work in the background. In effect, though, given the tiny space of the actual king in the picture and the invisibility of the canvas upon which the painter is daubing what is perhaps this very painting but perhaps in another form, in which the king is of a more appropriate size, one cannot say the painting is strictly *about* that sovereign dignitary. The title alone, referring to at least some of the young ladies in the foreground, suggests as much in terms of the painting’s *content*; rather, at the level of *form*, the picture concerns the *act* of representing itself, as gestured towards by the huge size of the canvas that the painted painter (painting) is working on, as he examines us (or at least the King and Queen), larger by as much again as the *meninas* themselves. Representation here becomes reflexive within a painting, and, also, the representation becomes immanent *to* that which is being represented.

The painting presents us with a near coincidence between the subject and the object of the painting — the viewer, us, the subject, in the place of the king, the object being represented — (and the painting, let it be noted, is a *non*-linguistic medium of representation). The transcendental and the empirical are being folded over onto each other. We are witnessing a transition in the nature of sovereignty: from transcendent to immanent, and at the same time the usurpation of language by man. For Foucault, this is the birth of man

as he is understood today, and as he is presupposed by the human sciences, as a condition for the possibility of their *being* sciences.

This is how Foucault expresses the prefiguration of the birth of man to be found here: ‘in the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as *an object of knowledge* and as *a subject that knows*: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by *Las Meninas*’ (*Order of Things*, 312).

In the Classical age, the condition for the possibility of appearance, language, was transcendent to that which it represented, but in the Modern age the condition of possibility becomes immanent to the field of appearance, and it becomes man, who thus occupies the place of the transcendental conditions for the possibility of an object’s becoming empirically available, and stands as a part of that empirical field itself: man assumes a position at once transcendental and empirical — a transcendental that is no longer transcendent but rather immanent and empirical. Thus, the sovereign power, if it is indeed any longer sovereign, is no longer to be identified with transcendence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One might also understand the becoming immanent of the conditions of possibility in another way, which relates to the way in which the principle of intelligibility devolves upon the empirical regions themselves. Again Foucault uses the term ‘sovereign’ to refer to the linguistically controlled *space* of the representation of things in the Classical age, and clearly indicates a transition as we pass into the Modern age from the transcendence of the sovereign principle to the immanence of conditions of possibility: objects come to be understood as containing their own meaning and intelligibility, rather than this being imposed upon them from without, from a transcendent source: ‘The representation one makes to oneself of things no longer has to deploy, in a *sovereign space*, the table into which they have been ordered; it is, for that empirical individual who is man, the phenomenon — perhaps even less, the appearance — of *an order that now belongs to things themselves* and to their interior law’ (*Order of Things*, 313, emphases added).

Thus, Foucault can spell out this immanence in terms of those three positive features of man that were to become the objects of a rigorous though non-formal science: life, labour, and language. Each of these three, rather than having its principle of intelligibility in a space of linguistic representation that transcends it, will each have their own principle of intelligibility immanently contained within themselves: Life will have to be conceived in such a way as to explain living things, Labour to explain relations of production and exchange, and so on. Being must explain beings: being is divided, at least when it comes to the *regional* sciences of the human, into life, labour, and language — and Foucault employs the somewhat Heideggerian notion of ‘regional ontologies’ (*ontologies régionales*) here (*Order of Things*, 347/358).

With all this, we have the possibility of the human sciences, which study precisely those features of the human being which we have known to characterise him from the beginning: that he lives, speaks and works: his life, language, and labour will be reflected upon by the human sciences, and this reflection will constitute the invention of these sciences and the invention of man himself as the object *and* subject of these sciences, a reflection of man as the very condition for the possibility of such a thing as the arising of a *science* of the

Man enters the frame, transcendental subject of knowledge and object of knowledge in the form of his empirical life, labour, and language. Thus, he comes to exist in the form of something that can be both the subject and the object of its own interrogation, such that a *question* can arise within beings as a whole, a question directed at man's very being.

### **A new perspective on Heidegger's Dasein**

All of this opens a new perspective on Heidegger's notion of Dasein. If Dasein is that entity which we are and whose being is an issue for itself, a being broached by means of a *question* that it is capable of putting to itself — if, in other words, Dasein is a mystery and a question for itself, Foucault provides a historical genealogy *of* that very questionability: a historical tale recounting the moment of that question's emergence, and the conditions which make that question possible, the self-relation which that particular question involves, and that is to say an ontico-ontological relation: a relation between an entity and its own being — and thus, indirectly, with Being itself. The event of Being erupts no longer in language's tabulation of the world, but in man's perplexed relation with himself. Foucault's is, to use a phrase deployed much later by Giorgio Agamben in a different sense, an archaeology of *ontology* itself.

There has been a change in epoch; the history of the a priori has moved on, and the crown has passed from the symbolic order to its owner, the animal that has language.

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human. Or as Foucault puts it later on: man as the 'empirico-transcendental doublet' (here, '*redoublement*') is the figure 'in which the empirical contents of knowledge [*connaissance*] necessarily release [*délivrent*], of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible' (*Order of Things*, 322/333), thus making clear the existence of a most intimate connection between the becoming-immanent of principles to that which they govern and the human being as the site of the collapse of the transcendental-empirical divide.

Modern thought, Foucault tells us, which is to say thought that exists in the wake of this collapse, has always had to search for a discourse that would be neither 'of the order of reduction nor of the order of promise', which Foucault glosses as 'a discourse whose tension would keep separate the empirical and the transcendental [and hence not reduce the one to the other], while being directed at both [and hence not promising to leave the empirical or the transcendental altogether behind?]' (*Order of Things*, 320).

That we might link the invention of the human sciences on Foucault's account directly with Heidegger's notion of Dasein is intimated by the following interesting statement from Foucault himself: 'as long as Classical discourse lasted, no interrogation as to the mode of being implied by the cogito could be articulated' (*Order of Things*, 312). This is precisely what Heidegger says of Descartes, and by extension Husserl, in *Being and Time* and elsewhere. Just a little before this, in the same passage, Foucault tells us: 'it *was not possible* [before this point] for human existence to be called in *question*'. It had not yet 'become mysterious to itself' (ibid., 311, emphases added).

When Foucault describes modern Man as an 'empirico-transcendental doublet' ('doublet', this time: *un étrange doublet empirico-transcendental*) (*Order of Things*, 318/329), an empirical entity from which we can read off that which 'renders all knowledge possible' (ibid., 318), which is to say the very meaning of Being, he is repeating the hermeneutic gesture of Heidegger who suggests we treat Dasein as a text in which the meaning of Being may be deciphered.<sup>6</sup>

### **After the birth, the death of man: the return of language**

If we have described the birth of man, and if that birth will have 'doomed' (*un visage qui doit s'effacer*) (*Order of Things*, 313/324) man to a certain death, how does he disappear? Or

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<sup>6</sup> This textual metaphor (if metaphor it be) may be found in Heidegger, and understandably, Derrida will pick up on it, in 'The Ends of Man' (125–6).

Foucault also links the transcendental-empirical doublet to phenomenology and one may presume either to the always embodied status of subjectivity, stressed by Husserl and later by Merleau-Ponty above all, or perhaps even to Heidegger's own attempt to think the ontic and the ontological in their togetherness and differentiation: 'It [phenomenology] is doing no more, then, than fulfilling with greater care the hasty demands laid down when the attempt was made to make the empirical, in man, stand for the transcendental' (*Order of Things*, 321). Thus, phenomenology is 'the sensitive and precisely formulated acknowledgement of the great hiatus that occurred in the modern *episteme* at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (*Order of Things*, 325). The only problem is that this precisely binds it to the figure of man, and hence leaves it helpless when it comes to overcoming man. 'This is why phenomenology — even though it was first suggested by way of anti-psychologism [psychologism involving a pure reduction of the ideal to the material real, the normative to the factual, the transcendental to the empirical], or, rather, precisely in so far as, in opposition to psychologism, it revived the problem of the *a priori* and the transcendental motif — has never been able to exorcise its insidious kinship, its simultaneously promising and threatening proximity, to empirical analyses of man' (*Order of Things*, 325–6).



rather, how is he threatening to disappear in the twilight that presages the dawning of a posthuman age? This for Foucault would be an epoch in the history of *knowledge*, a new historical a priori or episteme, re-ordering the realm of knowledge such that man and his consciousness would be firmly confined to one insignificant corner of the universe.

In a fascinating passage, Foucault speaks of the *return of language*. This return is one of the primary threats to man in his centrality, sovereignty, and occupation of the reflexive empirico-transcendental position. The disappearance of language as the transparent medium of our experience at the waning of the Classical age was what first allowed man to appear, and its reappearance heralds his demise.

As the crucial 20th century sciences of linguistics, ethnology, and psychoanalysis reveal, language is a structure that far exceeds the control of the finite subject. And as the structure of language — together with all analogous ‘symbolic orders’ — swamps us once again with its infinite unconscious machinations, productive of meanings which the conscious mind can no longer be said exclusively to generate, man is threatened, in the sovereignty of his subjectivity, but even in his consistency and individuation.

Foucault goes on to identify the task imposed upon thought as the tide of language washes over man: we need to learn to think *together* the being of *man* and the being of *language*: ‘Is the task ahead of us to advance towards a mode of thought, unknown hitherto in our culture, that will make it possible to reflect at the same time, without discontinuity or contradiction, upon man’s being and the being of language’? (*Order of Things*, 338)

But he immediately goes on to say that this thought — not far distant from the task which Heideggerian phenomenology sets itself — is precisely what is *impossible*: ‘the right to conceive both of the being of language and of the being of man may be forever excluded; there may be, as it were, an ineradicable hiatus at that point (precisely that hiatus in which we exist and talk)’ (*Order of Things*, 339). And interestingly, for our purposes, Foucault goes on

to ‘dismiss as fantasy any anthropology in which there was any question of the being of language’ (ibid.).

In the very introduction to *The Order of Things*, Foucault had already taken to deriding anthropologies, ‘understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical’ with their ‘facile solutions’ (xxiii). As to engaging with them, naturally Foucault wishes to do so only at the archaeological level, which is to say not at the level of their truth, but in terms of the conditions which made their emergence as a recognised science possible, an engagement which he seems to consider these anthropologies themselves constitutively incapable of.

And yet is this just? We shall wonder whether perhaps one can imagine that an anthropology sufficiently philosophical and with a different attitude to the possibility or indeed desirability of the ‘end of man’ might nevertheless be able to reflect upon the conditions of its own emergence in the way that Foucault is attempting to. This would be to confront Foucault with something he never seriously addresses — to our knowledge — and that is the actual Philosophical Anthropologies of Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner, and particularly what in any case came, for the most part, too late for his attention, and that is the relatively recent deployment by Italian philosopher Paolo Virno of what he calls a ‘linguistic anthropology’ (cf. Virno 2018 [2013]).

Indeed, the idea of a linguistic anthropology is not at all unknown in Italian thought more generally: for instance, Giorgio Agamben’s notion of an anthropogenesis that takes place at the moment when language reflects upon itself and comes to speak of its own *potential* to signify, and thus to manifest this potential, prior to any *actual* signification: in this fold of language, the human being distinguishes itself from the animal, which *cannot*

deploy this potential as such. Thus, the human comes into its own for the first time, in the lap of language.<sup>7</sup>

### **Dogmatic anthropological slumber**

So why does Foucault believe this linguistic anthropology to be impossible?

Here it is worth recalling the prehistory of Foucault's 1966 text in a work at least five years younger, his *Introduction to Kant's 'Anthropology'*. Kant, the great transcendental philosopher, intent on keeping the transcendental and the empirical separate, was nevertheless the one who brought the transcendental down from its transcendent location and thus led the transcendental to fold over onto the empirical. What, then, did Kant say of anthropology?

To the three questions defining critical philosophy, Kant at a certain point adds a fourth: 'what is man?' and according to Foucault, this question from then on never altogether leaves thought, and 'produces, surreptitiously and in advance, the confusion of the empirical and the transcendental, even though Kant had demonstrated the division between them' (*Order of Things*, 341). Empirical man, in terms of his life or his body, his labour, and his language, is made to serve as the foundation of his own (transcendental) *finitude*, the finitude (of knowledge given the receptivity and hence non-creative non-intellectual character of (sensory) intuition) which the critical philosophy finds it necessary to assert against the twin horns of the dilemma between dogmatism and scepticism.

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<sup>7</sup> And it is noticeable that — despite the discourse on Kojève's 'last man' and related elements of his thought, together with an attempt to dismantle the straightforwardly metaphysical opposition between man and animal — the idea of an end of man seems ultimately to have been abandoned in Agamben's work, as if one cannot go beyond the stage of this somehow 'philosophical' (which is to say, up to a point, Aristotelian) anthropology, save in the direction of an 'other anthropology' (*Use of Bodies*, I.1.118). Thus, even if we are to move beyond the oppositional separation of man and other living things in a certain way, this move to the blessed eternal life of *zōē aiōnios* in which life and form are truly inextricable and life thus eludes at last its inclusive exclusion from forms of life that allowed sovereign power to enjoy such a hold over it, this would not be to exceed *man* (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory*, xiii).

Foucault suggests that, as we have seen with phenomenology, the contemporary inheritor of this confusion, but also with that which, up to a point only seems to be its opposite, positivism and eschatology (for example, Marxism) (*Order of Things*, 321), philosophy falls into a ‘dogmatic slumber’, the ‘sleep [...] of Anthropology’ or the ‘Anthropological Sleep’ (ibid., 341). It seems that this confusion of empirical and transcendental goes unnoticed or at least unthought in this somnolent night, which an archaeological mole finds to be the perfect time for digging.<sup>8</sup>

To think language and man together would be to think life, labour, language and the human in their empirical positivity (which contains an immanent principle of intelligibility) as the very foundation of man’s own intelligibility. But the only way to think this would be to produce a theory of scientific objects as containing their own intelligibility immanently within them, but — and is this Foucault’s point in this very difficult section?<sup>9</sup> — this would leave man as an instance separate from these empirical instances, even if not transcendent to them, without a role in the production of that intelligibility. That would be the end of phenomenology, at least insofar as it invokes consciousness as the transcendental source of meaning, and the end of the Kantian transcendentalism from which it would inherit this however embodied and hence empirically objectified subject.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Anthropology constitutes perhaps the fundamental arrangement that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day’, and this is disintegrating, ‘since we are beginning to recognise and denounce in it, in a critical mode, both a forgetfulness of the opening that made it possible and a stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an imminent new form of thought’ (*Order of Things*, 342).

<sup>9</sup> Foucault makes it clear that *philosophy*, as well as being the thought of the Same (the prevailing order of discursive intelligibility), is (and this is perhaps the same thing) that which attempts to conceive man at the level of radical finitude, while the aim of the human sciences is to traverse the empirical manifestations of that finitude (*Order of Things*, 347).

So, for Foucault, if anthropology as an a priori of all thought in the Modern age, is so bad, how much worst must it be for that philosophical school which explicitly names itself as such?

But our wager is that things here are rather better, and indeed as close to Foucault’s project as contemporary ethnology, psychoanalysis, and linguistics, since this philosophical anthropology would attend both to the empirical manifestations of man’s finitude, in all their inherent intelligibility, and to the radically finite indeterminate human around which they are centred (as ‘philosophy’ does in the account given above): thus the *combination* of philosophy and anthropology would allow the anthropological a priori to reach absolute self-consciousness, and perhaps even, if not to partake of the archaeological labour that Foucault carries out, at least to render it possible, or not exclude such a possibility.

Thus, a linguistic anthropology (just as one which concerned itself with biology or political economy) would be impossible precisely because it would still retain man in the ‘place of the king’, in a sovereign position which has in truth been engulfed by the sea of language, leaving an empty throne or a redundant and powerless monarch. Once language, labour, and life become *autonomously* intelligible, they have no need for the phenomenological or transcendental subject in order to acquire meaning: they have, in other words, no need of man, and anthropology ceases to be possible at this moment, which is to say precisely at the moment in which it becomes a *linguistic* anthropology. Linguistics, ethology, and psychoanalysis, from the beginning of the twentieth century if not earlier, but certainly by the 1960’s should have awoken us once and for all from this new slumber.<sup>10</sup>

Foucault is quite unambiguous: the very ‘task’ of contemporary thought is to awaken us from the dogmatic slumber of anthropology, ‘the threshold beyond which contemporary philosophy can begin thinking again’ (*Order of Things*, 342).<sup>11</sup>

And it will have been Nietzsche — at the end of the Kantian inheritance and in opposition to its German Idealist development — whose call will first have roused us from this unconsciousness: Nietzsche for whom the promise of the overman heralded the imminent demise of man, the ‘death of man’, *la mort de l’homme* (*Order of Things*, 342/353), to banish the last shades of God that man had projected onto the wall of his cave, but precisely because

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<sup>10</sup> Foucault seems to suggest that at least a certain form of ethnology, psychoanalysis, and linguistics (which means that one could quite easily read Foucault here as (implicitly) providing an archaeology of Jacques Lacan’s thought) can bring about the end of man, precisely by reaching for the *conditions* that made man possible as an object of knowledge, assisting in or encouraging *archaeological* work of the kind that Foucault himself attempts. We would like to suggest that a philosophical anthropology, contrary to Foucault’s own dismissal of anthropology, can play precisely such a role: indeed, Jacques Lacan would be one of this anthropology’s potential exemplars.

<sup>11</sup> And, thinking again of Heidegger’s relation to Foucault here (as the reference to the contrast between ‘philosophy’ and ‘thinking’ perhaps invites us to), it is worth noting that Foucault describes what stands beyond this threshold as a ‘purified ontology or a radical thought of being’ (*Order of Things*, 342). Heidegger perhaps straddles the threshold, rather than crossing over it unambiguously, insofar as he retains a notion of the centrality of the human.

there was a fire behind him, and thus the shadows were his own (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* §108).

### **Derrida: The Ends of Man**

With Nietzsche's clarion call still ringing in our ears, let us now turn to Derrida, and to what is implicitly his response to Foucault's text: 'The Ends of Man' given two years after *The Order of Things*, in 1968.

It was delivered at a conference in North America on Philosophy and Anthropology, or as Derrida puts it, simply, 'philosophical anthropology'. It in fact takes place under the sign of an epigraph from Foucault's *Order of Things*, after two others from Kant (on the treatment of man as an end) and Sartre (on the turning of ontology towards human or existentialist ends). The exergue is the only time Foucault is mentioned by name in the entire text, but his presence is subtly all-pervasive. As becomes clear towards the end, the text is a response to two readings of *Nietzsche* — one Foucauldian and the other Heideggerian.

The question Derrida raises for Foucault is whether man can ever have a *simple* end. Can he simply be killed off without that death being overcome in some kind of transfigured, perhaps spiritual, immortality, of the kind which the Hegelian sublation or *Aufhebung* gives to every concrete finite entity, elevating it to the dignity of a purer, ideal essence?

Can man fail to *survive* his own death?

In 'The Ends of Man', Derrida asks why French philosophy has failed to return to the three H's (Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger) *after* the collapse of their misreading in a humanist vein in the ten years following the war, under the sway of Alexander Kojève, in particular. His answer is that in each of these philosophers, there is a sublation — a *relève* — of man within that which was supposed to replace him: consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the transcendental ego in Husserl, and *Dasein* in Heidegger. The 'end' of man may thus be

seen to have *two* senses: goal and disappearance, completion and cessation; and this divergence or ambiguity is perhaps *impossible* to overcome, the word 'end' being 'undecidable' between these two significations.

Thus, Derrida explains why Foucault and his kin, who wish properly and unambiguously to surpass man, do *not* explicitly identify their project with any of these three 'phenomenologists', as if to explain why Foucault might so strenuously have distanced himself from this school (and indeed have kept silent for the most part with regard to his debt to Heidegger). This sublation of man, this endlessness, explains why Foucault would not have had recourse to phenomenology as his method for overcoming man; but is Derrida implying more than this?

Just as man is unsurpassable in phenomenology, being rather sublated there, as Foucault himself acknowledged in his assertion of the Kantian heritage of this movement, Derrida suggests that the very idea of an epistemological caesura between the Modern age of man and the overman is *everywhere and always* impossible. And this posthuman future may well be impossible because the Foucauldian-Nietzschean discourse is subject to the same logic of the *relève* of man — a fact marked graphically by the ambiguity of the word 'end' (*fin*), an ambivalence which, for Derrida, is impossible to close, at least within a certain context, and that context is metaphysics. Derrida tells us that this impossibility of avoiding a sublation of man in whatever is meant to supersede him holds sway everywhere that 'metaphysics [...] maintains its authority' ('Ends of Man', 121n15).

So, does metaphysics still hold sway in *Foucault*?

### **Language is metaphysics (and deconstruction)**

What is metaphysics? Derrida says something of metaphysics in the ‘Ends of Man’ which is remarkable for its directness: ‘metaphysics — that is, our language’ (‘Ends of Man’, 121n15).<sup>12</sup>

According to the structural linguistics which was so important for the development of Derrida’s thought, language itself is structured into sets of oppositions, and ultimately each term within language is defined oppositionally, which is to say, negatively, with respect to all of the other terms in the same system, as the absence of each and every other — an absence which is marked in the body of the signifier by traces — the present marks of absent things.

Such a decentred structure in which each element is identified solely by its differentiation with respect to all of the other elements within the same system, and without any reference to something that would stand *outside* of the system and thus *not* be defined in the same way, is therefore possessed of an inherent urge to stabilise itself and its meaning. It does so by providing itself with something like a centre, an anchoring point that would exceed the system and amount to a ‘transcendental signified’, a transcendent moment that

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<sup>12</sup> Although this would for Nietzsche, Heidegger and perhaps Wittgenstein refer primarily to the *propositional* structure of language, for Derrida it seems rather to refer to the existence of the opposition as such within the symbolic order. Here it is worth recalling Derrida’s *Spurs*, where the notion of oppositionality is itself said to define metaphysics: ‘if the form of opposition and the oppositional structure are themselves metaphysical, then the relation of metaphysics to its other [*son autre*] can no longer be one of opposition’ (117–19).

This is in some way relevant for Derrida’s wariness with regard to the notion of history: Heidegger, over the course of his career, comes to locate the *beginning* of metaphysics further and further back in time, and as a result is forced to extend its other limit symmetrically further and further into the future, until he at times seems compelled to doubt whether metaphysics can ever be ended, at least at a chronologically futural point, just as one might wonder if it will ever have begun. This is a notion that Derrida will affirm unreservedly, as becomes apparent in his enthusiastic extension of metaphysics right back to the moment at which we began to speak (but with the proviso that there are always at the same time, from the very beginning, outbreaks, transgressions of this, to be found at the heart of the most metaphysical of schemas).

This refusal even of a simple beginning, a before and an after of metaphysics, risks depriving Derrida of a philosophy of history. Perhaps the only way to defend Derrida on this point is to insist that his gesture does not compel him to assert an absolute homogeneity of the metaphysical space (cf. Bennington *Legislations*, 61ff for a sophisticated response to the question of Derrida and History). But in any case, one could always re-read *Of Grammatology* as it invokes the end of the book and the beginning of the age of writing, and one could imagine that the profusion or the extent of the openings Derrida identifies, beyond metaphysics, could change in proportion, and that this could be used to indicate or eventually define a not altogether rigorous border between different epochs.

In any case, this is noteworthy here since an encounter with both Foucault and Heidegger would constitute one potential location in which the question of Derrida and History might be worked out in its fundamentals.



would finally and completely determine the identity of each of the elements within the system.

Deconstruction would then devote itself to showing that this pure presence, this unadulterated positivity said to exceed the system of difference and negativity, is precisely in a relation of *opposition* with this system, and thus forms — in fact and even by rights — a *part* of the same system, which is to say that it does not unambiguously stand *outside* of the system which it was claimed to found, and hence cannot simply fulfil the role it was assigned by the discourse in question.

This positing of a moment of pure presence as that which is most fully in being and upon which all other entities depend is precisely the gesture of *metaphysical* philosophy, and in this sense we might say that ‘language is metaphysics’.

### **‘We philosophers, men’**

But this is not the only respect in which language is metaphysical. There are more particular instances. For example, there is one word of our language that Derrida focuses on from one end of the text to the other, and that is ‘we’ (*nous*). The ‘we’ of natural language and the natural attitude, everyday pre-philosophical common sense, the attitude of *man* in his natural habitat, and the ‘we’ spoken by the philosopher, at least from Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger, the ‘we’ that supposedly has some unity independently of the empirical determination of the species, *homo sapiens*, the ‘we’ of natural science and the natural attitude from which this science stems. The philosopher’s ‘we’ is a sublation that wishes to move beyond the natural, and to arrive at ‘we-consciousnesses’, ‘we egos’, ‘we Dasein’.

Those philosophers who wish to relinquish man seem unable to relinquish the vocalisation of a ‘we’, whilst failing to provide a way to unify this ‘we’ that does without all reference to the empirical species it surpasses in the direction of the transcendental. Derrida

attempts to demonstrate that this fact ties the philosopher's discourse back to precisely that empirical-natural language which they had professed a desire to overcome.<sup>13</sup>

It seems ultimately that if the sublation of man is a feature of *metaphysics* and not simply *phenomenology*, then we might say that it is a feature and a consequence of our very *language*.

It is a question of the relation between natural everyday language and that same language when it is taken up into philosophy in a technical manner. For Derrida, when we speak philosophically, we can only sublate our natural language, rather than leaving it behind altogether: in other words, in philosophical language, at least in the modern age — after the loss of the technical *lingua franca* of philosophical Latin and its Greek ancestor — our terms of art and the language that is modelled in its entirety upon their supposed precision can only be a modification of our *natural* language, and we shall not be able to free ourselves completely from the latter, as if in radical opposition to it. The same goes for any attempt to isolate a philosophical identity, as when a philosophical community attempts to say 'we' in a way that distinguishes it from empirical humanity and any of its races and nationalities — even its sexes; or when a philosopher attempts to speak on behalf of a community that might otherwise have naively and mistakenly attempted to identify itself (hence, from the philosopher, 'Dasein, the entity whom *we* are', 'transcendental egos', 'consciousnesses').

For Derrida, there is always a complicity between the 'we' spoken by philosophers, and the 'we' of natural language, such that this 'we', however purified and refined philosophically, still speaks of 'we men', *nous-les-hommes* (cf. 'Ends of Man', 124/148).

Language, as the very home of oppositions, tends to recolonise anything that would oppose itself to it. Hence language itself sublates, and overflows its own borders, expanding

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<sup>13</sup> Derrida will make an analogous gesture with respect to nationality and the philosophical form which this is sometimes taken to have, in his seminar on Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism (cf. Derrida 1992 & 2018).

its dominion indefinitely. This is nothing but the ABC of deconstruction itself, and yet here Derrida makes certain important points about this linguistic sublation in the context of Heidegger. In this case, Derrida speaks not so much of the relation between ordinary natural language and philosophical language, as of the relation between the language of *metaphysics* (philosophy) and the language of *thought*, reminiscent at the very least of the Heideggerian *Denken* that would come after metaphysics.

Building on and yet modifying an insight of Heidegger's, Derrida affirms that it is in fact necessary for the language of thought to 'metaphorise' the metaphysical language that it is attempting to surpass or 'deconstruct' ('Ends of Man', 131). In other words, *whenever* one wishes to deconstruct a language or a discourse, one has to borrow certain tropes, certain signifiers from that language, and then attempt to deploy them in such a way that they signify something different — this would be the deconstructive gesture, provided that it was carried out in full and avowed awareness that this is what one was doing. In Heidegger's case, this transition is a most subtle attempt at a metaphorical transportation from the ontic to the ontological, beings to Being, from a forgetfulness of Being that equates it with a fully present entity, such as god or the Platonic sun, to the recollection of a potentiality not at all modelled upon the present or the actual — and indeed, as a preliminary to this, a transition from man to Dasein, from one kind of proximity to self, and one kind of proximity between man and Being, to another: Heidegger's desired proximity between the essence of man and the essence of Being in the form of the question, or eventually of the grant or pledge (*Zusage*).

The question is, does our Heideggerian *Foucault* himself wish to avoid this metaphorical complicity — and can he? Is he able to relinquish man as completely as he seems to desire? Some of Derrida's other writings on Foucault, and in particular, 'Cogito and the History of Madness' (in *Writing and Difference*), lead one to think that he cannot, that

Foucault will precisely fail fully to overcome metaphysics or its language, and in his conception of *history* in particular...<sup>14</sup>

### Deconstruction's twin strategies

In trying to isolate the position of French philosophy when it comes to man, and also, implicitly the position of metaphysics as a whole, Derrida identifies two strategies that have been adopted with the intention of moving beyond man: one that remains on the same ground as metaphysics and attempts gradually to work its way out of it, in the way of hermeneutics with its gradual unfolding or stripping away of layers of pre-given meaning; and the other that leaps immediately to a different ground, to the outside. The first is characteristic of French Heideggerianism, not to say Heidegger himself, whilst in the second one can clearly recognise Foucault, at least on Derrida's reading which, on the topic of Nietzsche if not throughout, does not seem fully to acknowledge that there may be a Heideggerianism of *Foucault himself*, and hence that these two options might be more intertwined there than Derrida imagines.

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<sup>14</sup> As we have discussed earlier on, discerning a philosophy of history in Derrida is rendered particularly difficult by his critique of the idea of an 'epoch' and even of the very idea of a history as such *if* history has to be understood as either progression or regression, a circular return to some possibility destined by the beginning, an 'arche-telology'. This predisposes Derrida in advance to a certain scepticism about any radical discontinuity of the kind we find in the transition from the Modern age of man to the posthuman — just as it did with regard to the pre-metaphysical and the post-metaphysical in Heidegger. 'What has always left me a little perplexed with Foucault, beyond the debate on the *cogito*, is that while I understand very well the necessity of marking divisions, ruptures, and passages from one *episteme* to another, at the same time I have always had the impression that this risked making him less attentive to long sequences, in which one might find differences at work beyond even the Cartesian moment. [...] Foucault's typical gesture consists in hardening into an opposition a more complicated play of differences that stretches along a more extended time. To schematise in the extreme, I would say that Foucault sets up as ruptures and binary oppositions a range of more complex differences' (*For What Tomorrow*, 12).

But this predisposition is itself something that might and can be questioned, and precisely from a Foucauldian perspective (and perhaps even more, from an Agambenian one — Agamben, for whom Derrida has even less time). In other words, it might be the case that deconstruction is precisely unable or at least unprepared to deal with a notion of history such as one finds it in Foucault, much harder to assimilate to the arche-teleological or metaphysical notion of history that is more clearly discernible in the histories of Hegel and Heidegger, and that something like this will have rendered the encounter ultimately unsatisfactory.

Derrida immediately goes on to align these two forms of strategy — the Heideggerian and the Foucauldian — with two figures from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*: the *higher* man and the *overman* ('Ends of Man', 135). To simplify a little, the higher man would be the consummation of man, man's eternity and sublation, while the overman would be that which is simply beyond man, the jubilant forgetting of both the human and Being, absolute and welcomed oblivion of all metaphysics, theology and ontology both.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Derrida is quite adamant as to the risks of the second position, which would wish to leave an epoch or a system behind altogether, as if it were possibly simply to 'have done' with man, to oppose and end him, to cut the ties that allow one sense of 'end' to refer to the other. Language, metaphysics, sublates man behind our back, the apparently innocent word, 'we' binding thought to metaphysics, and metaphysics to pre-philosophy.

If Foucault wished in the end to move beyond the intrication of the empirical and the transcendental, beyond Kant and Kantian phenomenology, right up to Heidegger even, in his worse moments, as if this way of thinking were irremediably anthropological in asserting the intrication without being able to think it or pursue its archaeology, Derrida tethers us back to the necessity of remaining human, at least in a certain way and up to a certain point.

### **From Derrida to another version of the empirical-transcendental doublet**

But even if this is true, then it does not necessarily mean that we have simply to remain at the level of Derrida's deconstruction, for there is a particular discipline which considers this

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<sup>15</sup> The last line of Derrida's text, 'But who, we?' (followed very deliberately by the date, situating this question squarely in 'May 1968') puts in doubt at the very least the assured success of a complete jump beyond metaphysics, beyond man, that could do without the precautions deconstructive writing must always take to avoid falling back into a simple opposition that can only bind the opposites ever more tightly into the same system. But at the same time, this line renders questionable the possibility even of deciding between the two strategies, of there being a 'we' who could ultimately — and neutrally — agree on which option to choose. Perhaps the only community imaginable here will be something like the 'community of the question about the possibility of the question' and not the *answer*, which Derrida mentions at the outset of 'Violence and Metaphysics' (*Writing and Difference*, 98), and which would dwell precisely in that undecidability between the two options, on the very outer edge of metaphysics, without either toppling fully outside or remaining firmly within its borders.

empirical-transcendental doublet, man, that Derrida himself seems never to have more than mentioned in his published work, and it is just what 'The Ends of Man' begins by naming and effectively passing over, and that is Philosophical Anthropology.<sup>16</sup> We saw that Foucault made a similar elision.

To approach the transition to this new discipline, let us address the notion of propriety, authenticity, or closeness to self. Derrida speaks of the propriety, the property and self-proximity of man, as what continues to bind, for instance, Heidegger's 'Dasein' (the philosophical 'we') to 'man' (the 'we' of natural language and empirical science). It is as if, for Derrida, the end of man would have to be the end of man's propriety, the end of the mutual appropriation that exists for Heidegger between man and Being as a result of man's proximity to the enigma of his own being in the form of the question.

But in fact there is a third option, between the completion of man in full propriety and the end of this propriety in death; and that is the idea that what is proper to man is to have *nothing* proper, that man's specific determination is *indeterminacy*. This is one way of expressing, philosophically, the position of Philosophical Anthropology, as it emerged in Germany in the 1920's, and indeed earlier on, from J. G. Herder, if not from the Renaissance humanists, right back to Epimetheus.

To gain some insight into what this might mean and hence what this alternative could amount to, let us turn very briefly in closing to the German philosophical anthropologist, Arnold Gehlen.

### **Philosophical Anthropology: Gehlen**

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<sup>16</sup> The phrase arises again but only in passing, in the context of Heidegger's moving beyond it and also laying its foundations whilst not being at all interested in it, on p. 124 and p. 127.

Philosophical anthropology should by rights be promising for Derrida, because it actually carries out something that he calls for in his writings on animals, in particular. These writings are always concerned to break down either of the two traditional relations that have been posited as existing between man and the animal: metaphysical opposition and natural scientific continuity, qualitative and quantitative difference (once again, structurally the same gestures as those which Derrida habitually identifies, and which we have just encountered in the guises of the overman and the higher man with respect to the human).

In the name of this deconstruction, the refusal to accept either option and hence to remain (at least for a while) at the level of an a-poria, Derrida strongly encourages philosophy of the transcendental type to desist in its persistent ignoring of the data uncovered by the natural and empirical sciences, especially zoology and primatology, which at least since Darwin have tended to crush the idea of an opposition separating man and animal along with the supposed uniqueness of man that was consequent upon it.

In fact, philosophical anthropology (Max Scheler is exemplary here) both poses its own problem in just the same form as deconstruction (the aporia of continuity and discontinuity), and yet goes further, for it actually *deploys* the data that Derrida urges philosophy to welcome, and it does so in a way that Derrida himself hardly ever did.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Derrida describes this as a matter of ‘personal taste’ or an inclination towards the ‘fundamental’ — which is to say ‘transcendental’ — while adverting to Bernard Stiegler’s work, which *does* attend to a certain empiricity, as an essential complement to that approach: ‘I do not see why one should choose between a gesture of the Hegel-Husserl-Heidegger style and a more local, regional gesture. Each calls for the other. The distinctive trait of what is happening, in our time, the time of philosophy, of the sciences, and of the technologies to come, is perhaps the necessity, that we should be increasingly aware of, of this exchange [...], of this violent, reciprocal, troubling provocation. Someone like Stiegler is seriously interested in Heidegger and also in technologies of information, and in bioengineering. This is what is calling us: that we should not choose between the style of fundamental questions and that of local questions. That is the journey. [...] I feel I am between the two. I do not want to have to choose. In my own personal history and taste, I am more of a “fundamentalist”, so to speak, on Heidegger’s side; but I feel guilty enough to consider that I should be more interested in local questions’ (Derrida in Janicaud 2015 [2001], 362).

Just as much as Stiegler, who remains very close to philosophical anthropology, despite not always understanding himself in this way, the latter would provide another plausible demonstration of how post-Kantian philosophy can open itself to the work of the empirical sciences, without relinquishing all that it has gained by previously bracketing them out (this way of putting the point is indebted to Malabou, who shares the same gesture of refusing to choose that Derrida identifies in Stiegler).

### **The problem: continuity vs. discontinuity**

For philosophical anthropology, as for Derrida, two distinct conceptions of the relation between the human and the animal must be avoided: 1) the naturalistic position which assumes that man and animal share a single continuum and are not qualitatively different; and 2) the traditional metaphysical opposition, which asserts that man is unique among all the animals, and (is generally understood to be) superior to all of them, thanks to his possession of reason or language and a number of other things, from self-consciousness to an awareness of death.

### **The strategy of Philosophical Anthropology: man as uniquely lacking**

For Philosophical Anthropology, man is still unique and set apart from all of the other animals, but in a non-metaphysical way. Their approach is non-metaphysical in that it does not *presuppose* a single defining feature of man, like a rational intellect, transcendently, positing it as an eternal feature of all men. In general, their strategy is to focus on a certain inherent negativity within man, an *in*-determinacy or *non*-specialisation, an ‘*ex*-aptation’, rather than a positivity or surplus, that would pick out the human being uniquely and in turn *explain* the existence of all those positive super-natural traits which metaphysics assigned to man, for the most part without attending to their natural and negative foundation. The task then is to not presuppose an opposition between man and animal, as metaphysics does, but, on the basis of a certain use of empirical data regarding the human, to then restore an essential break between man and the other animals at another level and in another way.

Whatever it is that singles out the human, Philosophical Anthropology attempts to *explain* the emergence of any such distinguishing marks (spirit, intellect), with the help of the data from the empirical sciences: thus Philosophical Anthropology *begins* from the plane of



nature upon which the human is continuous with the animal. At the same time, while metaphysics asserted that man is from the beginning endowed with a single feature which makes him *greater* than all of the other animals, for Philosophical Anthropology, what makes man unique is that he begins with *less* than the animals. He *lacks* something in relation to them, and this is the indeterminacy or negativity that we have just invoked.

### **The undetermined animal**

From the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, through the Italian Renaissance to Herder and Nietzsche, there is a rich strand of philosophy and mythology which had already thought of man's uniqueness in this way. It forms something like the prehistory of the Philosophical Anthropology which combines empirical data with transcendental thought in an absolutely self-conscious way in the 20th century.

Nietzsche, despite everything we have seen and heard of his surpassing of man, is one of the most commonly avowed inspirations for Philosophical Anthropology. For Nietzsche, man is the animal 'as yet undetermined', the animal who *promises* to be something, but is not yet essentially anything (cf. *Genealogy of Morals*, 39). Man's uniqueness is that he has no one defining feature. And this could be read in two distinct ways, according to the Heideggerian and Foucauldian positions that Derrida outlines: either man is nothing essentially but is precisely thereby always and everywhere capable of dwelling in and upon the infinitely rich potentiality that is Being, and that is his privilege among the animals, to be affirmed and protected; or (the Foucauldian version) man is essentially nothing and thus remains subject to a sequence of historically variable interpretations, grounded solely on a void. Precisely because man is *essentially* indeterminate, a mere absence subject to an infinity of different cultural variations, he can eventually be swallowed up altogether by those symbolic orders which alone gave him his meaning and identity.

It seems clear that in order to remain *anthropology*, the discipline in question must position itself somewhat closer to the former, a fact which perhaps helps to explain the very unpopularity of Philosophical Anthropology after the posthuman turn of the 1960's. Or perhaps more precisely, Philosophical Anthropology must dwell on the *natural* indeterminacy of man which underlies and explains the possibility of this multiplicity of cultural interpretations and identifications, and it is the naturalistic character of this gesture that means it in fact *ceases* to be Heideggerian at a certain point, even if Heidegger, perhaps just once (in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*) made some important steps in that very uncharacteristic direction.

In any case, the position of Philosophical Anthropology asserts that what differentiates man from the rest of the animals is not (at least not *in the first place*) the fact that he alone is rational, spiritual, technical, or that he has an unconscious; but that he has found it necessary to interpret himself in an endless series of ways in a constantly renewed attempt to differentiate himself from the animal, upon finding himself to be without any positive defining traits. He has had to use fire to forge the bricks of the house of language and symbolic culture that he will live in, and indeed which it will prove necessary for him to occupy if he is to survive.

### **Maladaptation**

Gehlen agrees that the human has no single trait uniquely its own; but if we take *all* of its traits together then their totality *does* characterise it uniquely. What Philosophical Anthropology must do is to show *why* these traits form a totality, *how* it is that they can all belong to one single species, and this will involve locating the primal *biological* fact that founds this constellation, a single defect that gives rise to multiplicity, something like the

crack in the One giving rise to the multiple identities that cover it over.<sup>18</sup>

This would suggest that, while the multiplicity of cultural traits alone is insufficient to describe the human, neither is biology enough, since man is not a purely biological figure. And yet this jointure between the biological and the symbolic, *zōon* and *logos*, nature and culture, *can* be explained *naturalistically*. This explanation involves the fact that the human being is *naturally unfitted* to survive — its organs and instincts are not specifically adapted to any one stable environment that would sustain it without further ado.

In the earlier parts of the 20th century, animals other than man were understood to have a fixed, finite environment, to which their instincts and sensori-motor organs were adapted. One stimulus from that environment evoked just one particular instinctual response from the animal, automatically — along the lines of a machine. To this extent, Descartes was right. An animal's instincts were bi-univocally connected to and triggered by unambiguous signals received from their environment. Above all we associate this position with Jakob von Uexküll, but it may be found in so many empirically and philosophically informed conceptions of animality from the first four decades of the century, right up to Jacques Lacan from the 1940's onwards, and Paolo Virno from the 1980's, to take just two (privileged) examples.

The human, on the other hand — and this view cannot be said so easily to have been surpassed by more recent insights — lacks at birth the specialised organs and instincts which would allow it to have such a finite encircling world. Man is *not* naturally adapted to a single environment, and this lack of specialisation means that the signals which we receive from the outside are not limited to those which are relevant for our species' survival; rather, the human

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<sup>18</sup> These many traits are identified by a *variety* of different sciences, so the explanation of what unifies them cannot be arrived at if one simply confines oneself to a single science. For Gehlen, we need *philosophy*, to gather the traits together and then to trace them back to a single foundation, which would in itself be biologically specifiable, up to a point. Philosophy would then be the discipline capable of determining the manner in which a negativity, a deficiency, can be translated into a remarkable positivity and advantage.

receives every single signal, from, as Gehlen says, the farthest mountains to the most distant stars, so many of which have no immediate relevance at all to the survival of the species (*Man*, 73). Man does not have an environment; he has a world, and one that is potentially limitless: from the openness of indeterminacy, the negativity of a lack, there issues an infinity (which will in turn require us to seek ‘relief’ [*Entlastung*] from its overwhelming burden<sup>19</sup>).

The ultimate biological cause of this disadaptation may be said to be man’s prematurity of birth (as Louis Bolk, Adolf Portmann, and Lacan had it (cf. *Man*, 36) — Gehlen will also speak, in a way closer to Freud’s *Hilflosigkeit*, of man as an ‘unspecialised, organically helpless being’ [*Man*, 72], but also of ‘immaturity’ [*Man*, 33]), today referred to under the heading of ‘neoteny’, the retention of childhood and even foetal traits into what should be our autonomous and independent adulthood: the remnant irrationality of the age of reason.

The human infant is born without pelt (and remains so forever), without organs to defend itself, no seriously developed motor skills, quite unable to fend for itself, fundamentally lacking an inborn knowledge of how to respond to its ‘environment’ — and indeed, it is without environment for precisely that reason. Thus, the human child’s period of tutelage remains unrivalled by any comparable animal.<sup>20</sup>

This is what Gehlen means when he describes man as a *Mängelwesen*, a deficient entity, a creature of lack.

### **Reversal of the negative into the positive**

Perhaps the most important point, philosophically speaking, concerns the reversal of this lack

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<sup>19</sup> This complexifies the picture somewhat: Gehlen understands ‘relief’ to amount to the selection from an infinity of stimuli that is a consequence of the ‘world-open’ character of man’s perceptual apparatus: thus the *lack* will already have been translated into an infinite *surfeit* at that level, and the task of anthropogenesis will (also) amount to a finitisation of that infinitude (cf. *Man*, 30).

<sup>20</sup> Gehlen acknowledges Adolf Portmann as an important source of insight on the question of man’s ‘prematurity’ (*Man*, 35–7).

into a positivity, a conversion which philosophy has the task of identifying and thinking.<sup>21</sup>

After all, this lack is not, on its own, what makes man unique, and indeed, it is quite likely that this indeterminacy could not be identified *as* negative were it not for the (comparatively) *positive* compensation that arises in response to it.

Indeed, perhaps one could put it in the following way: even if we were to understand the indeterminacy of the human animal as a negativity, this lack would still be a merely *quantitative* and not a qualitative deficiency with respect to the other animals: the human being's childhood is simply *longer*; its instincts *less* well-adapted. But this (quantitative) lack is the *foundation* of the human being's (*qualitative*) uniqueness. And this foundation, which takes the form of a reversal of the (retrospectively perceived) lack into a surplus, is the business of philosophy to describe.

It is important to stress that this foundation is biological, it is natural. It is biological because ultimately what is being asked here is a question to do with life: how can a dis-adapted animal like man simply survive, before anything else that it may achieve — how can it live? Naturally, after a certain point, it cannot and could not have — and yet it did. Something else is needed to supplement deficient naturality, and that supplement has often been spoken of in terms of 'culture', the symbolic-artificial crutch of a hobbled nature. As Gehlen has it, '[t]he clearly defined, biologically precise concept of the environment is thus not applicable to man, for what "environment" is to animals, "the second nature", or culture, is to man (*Man*, 71), and "this cultural sphere is his "environment" and belongs, indeed, to the *natural* requirements for life of this unspecialised, organically helpless being. "Culture" is hence an anthrobiological concept and man is a cultural being' (*Man*, 72).

Instinctual disadaptation means that the human being has an infinite world of objects

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<sup>21</sup> Anticipating the centrality of this term to Malabou's work, Gehlen speaks of the transformation of the 'unspecialised' range of movements enjoyed by the human body into their 'unlimited plasticity', a motor consequence of the perceptual infinity of world-openness (*Man*, 33).

that it has somehow to make sense of, and among which it must make its home. To put it very simply, if there is no environment to which the human is innately adapted, it must construct its own environment. To do this it needs to employ skills (*technai*), including linguistic and symbolic faculties (to interpret or to select what signals will be salient for it, to make sense of the profuse data — and thus to experience ‘relief’ or ‘disburdening’), it will have to develop techniques, and ultimately it may, although it need not, invent technology.

In the end, to make sense of this excess of stimulation striking it from outside, the human will form a symbolic, linguistically-mediated world of institutions, establishments of Culture which will in some way supplement, temporarily and in a historically variant way, with disparate degrees of success at least partly dependent upon the political arrangements of its society, the absence of a natural environment. Symbols and institutions — *logos*, *technē*, and *polis* — are the remedy for man’s lacking a one-to-one relationship between stimulus and response, his disadaptation to the world.

Thus, the compensations for the biological lack of which Gehlen speaks, amount to what Hegel calls ‘objective spirit’ and even ‘absolute spirit’, the objective forms assumed by human subjectivity. These encompass the historical, political, legal, and moral world of traditions, mores, and conventions, right up to the realms of art, religion, and philosophy — in short, the world of non-natural symbolic laws and the fabrications of technology, the order of culture.<sup>22</sup>

### **The reversal as defining the uniqueness of man**

The human being is born naturally unfitted to survive, premature, and yet it survives, by means of its technique, its intellect, and its language. The human being lacks the natural

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<sup>22</sup> It is just this fact that has led some contemporary Hegelians, including Malabou and Slavoj Žižek, to attempt to theorise the missing link between biology and symbol, nature and culture, precisely by means of an examination of the joint which articulates subjective spirit or mind and objective spirit, with a particular attention to the role of habit and repetition at this juncture.

conditions for its survival, and yet it survives and even flourishes, with the help of the technical supports which it invents. Thus, the human deficiency (*Mängel*) is transformed into the very means of its flourishing, its inferiority into its superiority.

It is worth noting that this is not the same as a restoration of harmony akin to that which we imagine the animals to enjoy, for nothing like a ‘natural balance’ or equilibrium is achieved by these technical-artificial means; rather, the compensation risks becoming so excessive, so imbalanced, that (the very idea of) nature itself eventually comes to be threatened by an anthropocenic culture with its destructive and unsustainable technologies.

In any case, all of the human being’s specific traits are then understood as positive replacements for negatives. A minus is transformed into a plus, and this *conversion* defines the unique essence of man as a bio-linguistic or zoo-logical entity:<sup>23</sup> ‘all the deficiencies in the human constitution, which under natural conditions would constitute grave handicaps to survival, become for man, through his own initiative and action, the very means of his survival; this is the foundation for man’s character as an acting being and for his unique place in the world’ (*Man*, 28).

Man is instinctually lacking, and all of the features that metaphysics has taken to be distinctive of man, are merely symbolic *compensations* for this initial biological lack. In short, what unifies or totalises all of the many apparently distinguishing traits of man is the fact that they are *all* compensations for the same natural defect.<sup>24</sup> This should clarify what the task of Philosophical Anthropology actually is, for Gehlen: to describe how man’s specific

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<sup>23</sup> One might also think of the ‘eccentric position’ of the human in relation to its body — the gap between *being* and *having* a body — upon which Helmuth Plessner has laid such stress. This is a discrepancy which renders the human being *less* competent than the animal, but it is also the basis for its ultimate *superiority* at the level of language and reason. The potential schism between being and having (‘eccentricity’ or ‘eccentric position’), in Plessner, explains man’s very uniqueness and precisely by unifying all of the many positive traits which without this ground would fail to form a unity (cf. *Laughing and Crying*, 39). ‘In the eccentric position, the formal condition is given under which man’s essential characteristics and monopolies appear in their indissoluble unity (indissoluble in meaning)’ (ibid., 40).

<sup>24</sup> This would imply that, without reference to the natural, this unity and hence the meaning of this multiplicity of traits could not become apparent, and hence the human would not be altogether understood — thus the *necessity* of the recourse to the biological even beyond any naturalistic imperative.

*supernatural* traits, his symbolic intelligence and language (the *logos* of philosophical account), are necessitated by his *biological* nature, how spirit and intelligence emerge from life, as Scheler put it, in his crystalline terms.

This is our task as well: to demonstrate the physical genesis of the meta-physical, the metaphysical tendency but also simply the super-natural understood as symbolico-politico-technical.

## **Conclusion**

To reassert the possibility of anthropology in posthuman times, in the wake of May '68, we have to come to terms with the Foucauldian problematic of the death of man, and negotiate a certain route out of it, towards a reinvention of 'man'. We have therefore sought indefinitely to postpone the movement beyond man towards a certain posthumanism. The way we chose to follow in order to pursue this was one of the philosophically most powerful: Derrida's attempt to reopen the ambiguity of the 'ends of man'. And yet we explicated this movement in such a way that a potential limitation of Derrida's own work was revealed, and that is a limitation when it comes to the implication within philosophical theory of empirical data from the natural sciences. This is where we began to wonder if philosophical anthropology might come into play, and to take the form of the 'linguistic anthropology' the possibility of which was denied by Foucault.

More specifically, the turn to philosophical anthropology lets us affirm a certain uniqueness of the human but in a way that avoids the dilemma between continuity and metaphysical opposition that Derrida insisted upon, whilst also supplementing Foucault's early blindness to the possibility of anthropology itself: a natural, empirically specified lack is transformed into an excess in the guise of the unnatural spiritual features of man which come to compensate for it. And this gesture of compensation is what makes man unique,



oppositionally separated from the non-human animals in the end, but not at the beginning.

We might describe this process as the passage from a quantitative *difference* to a qualitative *opposition*, and thus the natural genesis, so far as such a thing is amenable to description, of the symbolic order of signifiers, understood as the very place of oppositions — the biological emergence of the symbol or rather the word.

Thus ultimately, the human can be said to be *neither* less *nor* more than the animal; it is rather uniquely different in transforming a minus into a plus, a negative into a positive, both of which have no sense outside of their relation with the other. In man, a deficient life blossoms into an overflowing and superabundant spirit.

Philosophical Anthropology thus incorporates both empirical science and philosophical insight, providing a reflective version of the transcendental-empirical fold which Foucault condemned it to remain unable properly to think. The initial lack is specified *empirically* and on the basis of a continuum posited between man and the other animals, while the compensations, in their totality, can only be identified by *philosophy* — and, most importantly, the human's cultural-symbolic order is indeed radically lacking in all other animals. Thus what Philosophical Anthropology gives us is an example of an empirically informed, materialist understanding of the biological basis for positing an opposition between man and animal, an opposition that will not be metaphysical. And equally importantly, it gives us a genetic account of the very emergence of oppositions as such, and hence of the signifier, which man alone possesses, or which possesses him: something like an *empirical* genesis of the *transcendental* in the guise of man understood as the animal possessed of language (*animal rationale*, *zōon logon echon*), the philosophical animal or the human being on philosophy's account. In the guise of philosophical anthropology, a *linguistic* anthropology would indeed be possible.

Foucault refused to believe in such a thing, and denied us the possibility of thinking

man and language together. But Derrida's work allowed us to demonstrate that not only may such a thing be possible, it might also be necessary, and Philosophical Anthropology presents us with an example of one way in which this linguistic anthropology might be carried out.

If one is concerned at the perhaps overwhelmingly conservative bent of the German Philosophical Anthropologists (Gehlen, in particular, in his theory of those institutions which must come to stabilise the unstable human animal), and if one thinks that no-one today could possibly think of relying on such supposedly outdated science, particularly when it comes to the animal, it is the merit of Paolo Virno to have shown how these very ideas can be turned in quite the opposite political direction. He makes the case, today, and precisely with the intention of understanding our contemporary moment, for deploying these ideas of animal and human nature, and this precisely involves a subtle rethinking of the *empirical* in relation to the transcendental: in other words, the empirical facts are not treated naively, as perhaps they were by some of the earlier ethologists and zoologists, if not by the Philosophical Anthropologists themselves.

And the work of Jacques Lacan, whom Foucault will have spoken so little about — although perhaps by indirection he says quite a lot, even giving us a potential genealogy of his thought, at the intersection of the three sciences which were so important to him and to the current age: ethnology, linguistics and psychoanalysis, in which language takes its revenge upon man — may be seen at the same time to develop just this kind of linguistic anthropology, an account of the emergence of oppositions, the genesis of structure, that Foucault ruled out.

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